

# FIRST STEPS TO LAWN TENNIS

A. E. BEAMISH



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"First Steps to Lawn Tennis"—Front







# FIRST STEPS TO LAWN TENNIS







A. E. BEAMISH  
Roehampton Club

*Graflex*

January, 1922

# FIRST STEPS TO LAWN TENNIS

BY  
A. E. BEAMISH  
ROEHAMPTON CLUB

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# FIRST STEPS TO LAWN TENNIS

## INTRODUCTION

THE main object of this little book is to give to beginners that instruction which will enable them to acquire the correct method of producing the primary strokes of the game. Such advice must of necessity be very general in its character, as different physiques employ different means. Yet underlying every method there is, or should be, a principle on which this method is founded, and it is the writer's aim to make as clear as possible these fundamental rules, so that the beginner may be able to produce the simple strokes of the game, and acquire a sound style without which he will never be able to advance far along the road to success. For what is termed "good style," as distinct from natural grace of movement, is merely the manner of making all the strokes of the game by a method which allows of the largest margin of error in

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the event of a miscalculation and unexpected happening immediately before, during, and after the beginning of the actual stroke. Hence the necessity for its acquisition through understanding the first principles on which each stroke is based. Again, since Lawn Tennis is a game played with one hand, the beginner finds it far easier to play in its very early stages than either cricket or golf, which being two-handed are more artificial in their practice. As a rule, what is easily acquired at a game, unless one is specially gifted by nature, is what is of least value and generally hardest to discard. In the early stages of his struggles with the game the beginner will not be far wrong if he goes on the principle that all natural habits are bad habits, and acts accordingly. We can now pass to the consideration of two questions, to which players do not give sufficient attention, viz. their rackets and clothing for the game.

### **The Choice of a Racket, Remarks about Clothes and Shoes**

The average player, until fairly recent times, never paid much attention to the choice of the

racket he was getting, and still less to the question of the clothes in which he proposed to play.

His shoes probably received as little attention as either of the two first, and would in all probability have been neglected longer but for the painful manner in which he was made aware of their unworkmanlike qualities in use.

The favourite reply of "any old thing is good enough for me" was his usual answer to advice to get a good racket and new balls whenever possible. At other games—at billiards or golf, for example—no player, whether the limit man in his club handicap at billiards or an 18 handicap man at his golf club, would pay so little attention to the implements of his game.

So the beginner should be warned on no account to be too modest in his demands. He should, in fact, ask for and get the best in the matter of rackets and balls, clothes and shoes, for playing the game in as workmanlike and comfortable a manner as the manufacturers' skill can ensure.

When the novice chooses his racket, if he hasn't an expert friend to help him in person, he must remember certain points and hints as well as he

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can, or he will be sure to get something quite unsuited to him.

Generally speaking, he should be guided by the strength of his wrist and muscles, the size of his hand, and other physical details, which vary with everyone and consequently render any arbitrary rules for selection of the racket quite impossible.

In the writer's opinion there are three points at least which every good racket must possess, besides those which are demanded by the individual characteristics of the selector.

1. The racket must be well strung, i.e. have an even tension of gut all over the playing surface.

2. It must be well balanced, i.e. when swung back and downwards, swing easily without drag at any point. This quality is very difficult to find, except by contrast. The writer knows from the "feel" of the racket that "comes up badly" how the well-balanced article should behave.

3. The racket's head should be long rather than round in shape, with a concave block in the shoulder. This last detail is most necessary, for the sound reason that thereby about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch

more length is obtained in the main strings, which will thus have a correspondingly increased power of drive.

In addition to these vital points, the characteristics of a good racket, which the beginner should learn to look out for and recognize in the selection of his racket, there are other points, more individual to his own peculiarities, which he will have to find out for himself. He must exercise his judgment as to the size and shape of the handle, point of balance, style of stringing, and thickness of gut, as well as upon other small details not so important to the quality as to the appearance of the racket itself.

The beginner is advised to choose a racket of from  $13\frac{1}{2}$  oz. to  $14\frac{1}{2}$  oz. in weight, never less and never more, if for use by a man ; and one from 13 to  $13\frac{1}{2}$  oz., never more than this weight, if for use by a lady. The racket should be tightly strung (never play with a loosely strung racket at any cost), of medium gut, as having the best qualifications for wear, with a long head, and a concave block (for reason given above) at the shoulder. The size of the handle is so absolutely a matter of individual choice that no opinion can be given on the question ; the beginner,

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however, should remember that the ills attendant upon the use of too big a handle are greater than the penalties that wait upon the users of one too small. In the first instance, by giving the fingers too much to hold, the player will lose flexibility of wrist, and probably strain his muscles; in the second case, the racket will twist in the hand, more often than not, and the stroke be spoiled. In the first case downright damage will probably be done, in the latter merely some lost games. From this the beginner should know his best course is to get a handle that exactly suits him and avoid both evils.

### **Choice of Shoes and Clothes**

The player's shoes should come relatively next in importance to his racket. Too often they are last thought of, when his bag is being packed, hurriedly sought for, and stuffed in the last thing of all. The shoes known as "steel points," for play when courts are wet, suffer especially from this most culpable neglect, which, however, brings disaster on the forgetful player with the first wet day. An international player, who

## CHOICE OF SHOES AND CLOTHES 19

accompanied the writer to Australia on a Davis Cup tour, was guilty of this sin of omission, and was forced to wear a borrowed pair all through the tour when the weather was wet. He had left his "steel points" at home, he said, with his umbrella, and suffered accordingly.

The player's shoes should always be made to measure, be as perfect a fit (on the tight side when new) as possible, with the uppers of white buckskin (or mock buck in these days), and with thick soles of soft red or yellow rubber.

The soles composed of crêpe rubber are excellent for all surfaces, whether hard or grass, are capable of holding up the player on the most slippery grass court, after rain, and appear able to resist the hardest wear. The shoes with canvas uppers are useful to have as a second pair (every player should always start with two pairs of shoes), since they are light, allow the feet great freedom and flexibility in ankles and toes, and of course are far cheaper than those of buckskin. A third pair for wet weather, the "steel points" aforesaid, are not absolutely necessary for the beginner's wardrobe, until he begins tournament play. Then their value will be found very great indeed, and the beginner

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should get them early, practise in them and so become accustomed to the peculiar holding quality he will find they possess when he wears them for the first time. It is of the greatest importance to have the "steel points" made to measure and of a good fit.

The rest of the player's wardrobe, though less important from the point of view of the play, is no less worthy of careful selection from the consideration of health and fitness generally. It is now universally agreed that white flannel is the best material for trousers, since it is more absorbent, warmer, and does not require so much careful laundry work as the white duck material, which is still used by a few players. The shirt is usually of light cotton material, and should therefore be changed immediately after play, to avoid chills. A sweater of the coat type to button down the front and with long sleeves is a necessity in the climate of this country, and, with his racket, should accompany the player wherever he goes. A belt of leather, or elastic webbing if obtainable, is better than a silk scarf for the waist; a woolly wrap-scarf for the neck after playing should also be worn by every player in an English tournament.

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His socks should be of medium thickness and of a woolly mixture. The writer during the greater part of his tennis career has endeavoured in vain to find white socks that will not shrink after washing. Otherwise those of khaki colour are very useful, will not shrink, and look at any rate better than those of alternative shades.

Finally, if the player can wear a covering on his head without discomfort or inconvenience during play, a light-coloured felt Homburg hat is a very great advantage, since the sun nearly always finds the player most unprepared who is least able to withstand his light. Opponents soon find out weaknesses of this kind; and, after all, the use and habit of wearing a hat in play is valuable, since on hard courts abroad, or on grass in Australia, an uncovered head too often means a sunstroke which the wearing of a hat would always prevent.

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### ANALYSIS OF THE PRIMARY STROKES OF LAWN TENNIS

In the game of Lawn Tennis there are practically only three primary strokes, upon which the others are founded. The rules and methods governing the production of these strokes are fundamental, and apply in a more or less modified degree to them all. Thus the beginner should first of all understand the principles which affect the production of these strokes ; then he will be better able to appreciate their value, and the part they play, in the other more difficult shots he afterwards attempts.

Finally, he will obtain, in this way, a good grounding in the first principles of the general strokes of the game, which will help him very considerably in his more mature efforts later on.

Every stroke in the game of Lawn Tennis (as of golf) can be divided into three separate and distinct actions, which should be in practice, however, so harmoniously blended into one movement that no single one should appear more conspicuous than the other.

1. The first movement, or the preparatory

part of the stroke, is the swing back of the racket.

2. The second movement, or the working part of the stroke, is the forward swing of the racket, to meet the ball, and the blow itself.

3. The third, or the finishing part of the stroke, is the end of the racket's swing after it has met the ball; this controls the balance of the striker and regulates the power and strength of the shot.

Upon the first of these depends the accuracy of the second and the correct production of the third. The third, again, has a considerable power of affecting the second, in proportion to the amount of attention that is paid to it.

Thus all these movements are interdependent and affect one another to a considerable extent. Upon the manner in which they work depends the success of the whole series of which the stroke as a whole is comprised.

Now any golfer will tell you, and treat the thing as a truism, that the swing back of the club regulates the length of the shot. Very few Lawn Tennis players have applied this to their own game, consciously at least, and are not aware that the racket's backward swing should

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be long or short as the stroke intended is to be deep or short. Neglect of this fairly obvious fact is one of the most frequent causes of mistiming, loss of power, and "snatching"—that complaint of the beginner, whose eagerness to hit the ball hurries the backward swing into the actual stroke itself and ruins the timing of the shot.

Again, upon the unimpeded finish of the racket's swing after the ball has been hit depends the power of the stroke and the balance of the player's body, as well as the smooth production of the stroke without jerk or check.

And once more, as with the golf club, this free follow through of the racket after the ball has been struck has a kind of retrospective value on the stroke itself. For as a general rule, when the follow through is freely made the player's balance is sustained, and the stroke then gets every single atom of value from the swing of the racket and the transference of the player's body weight from one foot to the other.

Play the shot with a checked follow through and the tightening up of the muscles that will nearly always precede this fault—if it is not a





*Graflex*

## 2. POSITION TO RECEIVE SERVICE

Note left hand supporting the head of the racket—to ease racket arm, and allow of quick change of grip for fore, or back-hand, stroke. A half turn to the right of the right foot with the left foot moved round and forward will enable the player to get into the position for the forehand stroke ; and a half turn to the left of the left foot and the right foot moved round and forward, the position for the backhand stroke.

reason for it—will cause the ball to be mistimed and the stroke spoiled.

Thus, if beginners would appreciate the fact that each of these three actions, that comprise the stroke, has its value in the whole movement, they would give more care to them severally and successively, and so be enabled to make each shot as perfectly as their skill and capacity to put them into practice will permit.

## Footwork

Is a term capable of a double interpretation, one general and the other special. It can be defined in its general sense as the manner in which the player makes use of his speed of foot and in getting to the ball. In its special sense it is the way in which he uses his feet to distribute the weight of his body in the course of making the stroke. It is the most important factor towards the formation of a good style, and should obtain the greatest attention of the beginner. At Lawn Tennis, as at cricket, golf, and boxing, the manner in which the weight of the body is used will be found to be of the utmost value in giving power and smoothness

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of movement to every stroke. The position of the feet, upon which depends the correct distribution of the body weight, must be studied as early as possible by the beginner, so that after the correct stance for the various strokes has been acquired, first of all consciously, it may become later quite naturally a procedure of "second nature" in the production of all his strokes.

For a correct stance is not a natural thing at all, since the game is not played, as cricket and golf, from a stationary position, and a human being cannot move fast sideways like a crab. Therefore the player must learn to put himself into the sideways position to the direction of the ball's flight, with his feet more or less parallel to it, and his shoulders at right angles to the net, when he shapes to make all his ground strokes. (The same rule holds good for his stance for volleying; but as sufficient time may be lacking in this type of stroke, the rigour of the rule must of necessity be relaxed in many instances.) And this stance is obtained as early as possible by the player's speed of foot and judgment, which have enabled him first of all to estimate the spot where he can

best meet the ball, and then to get there in time to make the stroke correctly. With these points before him, with regard to the dual meaning of footwork, the learner can now proceed to the actual production of the various strokes themselves.

### **The Grip**

The manner in which the player should hold his racket when he first begins to play Lawn Tennis is most important.

Upon the method he chooses will depend the type of stroke that he will produce, and this in turn will affect his stance and footwork throughout the rest of his game.

Thus it is most important for the player, before everything, to decide what "grip" he will adopt.

In this he should be guided by physical considerations, as well as by natural tendencies. If, for example, he has a specially strong wrist or forearm, or has played other games which may give him a tendency to make the strokes at Lawn Tennis in a certain manner, he should be advised to allow for these factors in adopting a hold. For, other things being equal, the grip which is natural to a player will without doubt

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be the best for his game in the long run, even if it may preclude him, through its limitations, from ever becoming a champion. Thus let him adopt a grip that is most comfortable, and natural, and best suited to his strength. The golden rule is that there is no arbitrary rule to be followed in this respect.

In order to produce correctly the two of the three primary strokes of the game, the forehand and backhand shots, the player will have to employ a different hold of his racket for each stroke, since an unchanged grip which is adapted for the best strokes on both wings is a practical impossibility.

The late R. F. Doherty, who had a most perfectly produced backhand stroke, used the backhand grip for both strokes, and consequently lost in power and speed on the forehand shot what he gained on all the shots made on the other wing.

### **Forehand Grip**

The player should grasp the handle of the racket so that it lies along the hand diagonally, and not straight across the palm, with the handle





*Graflex*

### 3. FOREHAND GRIP. FRONT VIEW

The wrist is kept very firm and tense, but is shown rather arched in the photograph. The forefinger is separated from the others to allow of greater comfort and flexibility in the hold. The thumb and forefinger supply the power, the other fingers the control in the grip of the handle.





*Graflex*

#### 4. FOREHAND GRIP. BACK VIEW

The wrist is quite firm, as in the front view of the grip. Note oblique nature of the hold and the spread forefinger (more noticeable from this view), to give ease and comfort in the grip.

more in the same straight line with the forearm than at right angles to it. The player's arm should not be completely extended (the elbow joint being allowed to remain slightly bent) when the stroke is made. The head of the racket should, speaking generally, be parallel with the ground, but may be supported slightly above the hand by tightening the wrist, which should always remain tense and never be relaxed.

The forefinger of the hand should be separated from the other fingers in the hold of the handle, since thereby a more comfortable, firm grip is obtained. This will enable the racket to be held without that stiffening of the wrist which too close and tight a grasp of the handle always produces.

The thumb should lie across the handle, and not tightly round it, since by this latter hold the wrist is also stiffened, and thereby loses its flexibility. The player with such a grip will be able to impart top spin to all his strokes without being compelled to turn over the head of the racket to any appreciable extent in their production. He will be able also to meet the ball with the full face of the racket with neither top nor cut, and so to get the utmost speed from

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the shot. And, if necessary, he will be able to take fast services on the rise with more control, and certainty, than he could by employing a grip with a more "open" face (i.e. face slanting away from the ball) to his racket. Such a hold is more generally useful than any other, since with it the player can employ top spin, cut, or full-faced shots without any turning of the wrist; he can take rising balls with more certainty, and is enabled generally to obtain great control in making all his strokes.

### FOREHAND STROKE

For this stroke as much care should be taken by the player over his footwork as for the shot more awkward to produce on the other side of the body, viz. the backhand. But as the former has suffered from being insufficiently studied, so the latter has turned out too often a failure from being half attempted. Thus beginners generally are too confident in the one case, and too diffident in the other, and end by failing to play either of the strokes with any degree of accuracy. Footwork must again play a large part in the correct production of this stroke,





*Graflex*

### 5. FOREHAND STROKE. BEGINNING OF SWING

Note full swing back of the racket with the wrist kept down and controlled; body turned sideways to the base line to allow the right shoulder to have effect in the swing of the arm; weight on foot furthest from the net, ready to be transferred to front foot as the stroke is completed.

since the body's weight (as at golf again) must be used, and transferred from one foot to the other in the course of the stroke, in order to obtain added power which the smoothness and rhythm of the whole movement will give.

To produce correctly the stroke the player should turn his body sideways to the net, with the feet apart and parallel to the base-line. The weight of the body should remain as much as possible on the right foot (for a right-handed player), until the stroke is half completed, when it should begin to be transferred to the left (front) foot as the racket strikes the ball, and be entirely shifted on to the front foot as it finishes the stroke and swings round in the course of the follow through, which should cause it to finish its swing near the left shoulder. The right (or back) foot may be lifted from the ground as soon as, but never before, the ball has been struck. This will be found to give a more complete follow through to the stroke, and in addition to help the player's mobility and prevent him from remaining planted on the court after the stroke has been made. The ball should be taken as high as possible and when it is at a point about the middle of the player's body.

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By means of the backward swing of the racket the speed and smoothness of the stroke are obtained, by the length of the backward swing its power. The head of the racket from the beginning of the forward stroke should be swung as much as possible parallel with the ground. If, however, extra control is desired—for example in shots directed down the side-line from the player's forehand court—the head of the racket may be supported above the wrist, which must always be kept quite firm and tense. The face of the racket should meet the ball almost full, a little slanted forward towards the line of the ball's flight, if desired, as the stroke is made, to give top spin to the ball. The follow through should be full and unchecked.

To ensure this and to avoid straining the muscles of the forearm, as the racket is swept round, turn the wrist over and with it the head of the racket just after the ball is struck. Otherwise the wrist throughout the stroke should be kept very firm and tense without the smallest suspicion of "flabbiness," or relaxation in the swing back, or forward, or as the ball is struck.

All the strokes should be made as far from the body as possible, but the elbow joint should





*Graflex*

#### 6. FOREHAND STROKE. HALFWAY THROUGH SWING

The forearm is quite firm and the wrist tense, with the head of the racket supported above it.

The weight of the body has just left the right, and is on the left foot, as the shoulder is coming round to complete the follow through outside the left arm.





*Graflex*

### 7. FOREHAND STROKE. FINISH OF SWING

The position is quite correct ; the stroke has had all the value of the rotation of the shoulders, swing and full follow through of the racket. The weight of the body has been transferred as well from the right to the left foot in the course of the stroke's finish. Note racket turned over at very end of the swing to ease the muscles of the forearm,

never be quite straightened out, nor the balance lost by leaning too far forward to meet the ball, since the body weight should be put into the stroke by transferring it from one foot to the other in the course of the shot.

### **Chief Difficulties of the Stroke for Beginners**

This stroke should not present any very great difficulties to the beginner, if he has first of all learned to put himself into the sideways position to the net, and to swing his racket at the ball instead of merely hitting it. His chief faults will be caused by over-confidence rather than by diffidence. He will probably find that he wants to take the ball much too close to his body ; that he is allowing his wrist to become slack, and the head of the racket to fall below the level of his hand, as he hits the ball ; that he is neglecting to use the other shoulder for turning his body to get power into the racket's swing ; and last of all, that he has kept his weight on both feet and is probably not using it in the direction of the stroke but away from it.

### **Forehand Stroke down the Line**

The method of making the shot down the line

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differs from the usual, or cross-court, stroke in two details—the position of the feet, upon which depends the use of the body weight, and, since less body swing is required, a more restrained use of the left (or unemployed shoulder) in helping to turn the body for the stroke.

The body should be in the sideways position to the net, with the feet similarly placed as for the other shot, except that the front foot should be thrown nearer the line of the ball's flight than the back foot; both should be at right angles to the flight of the ball, which for this shot down the line should be hit a little later, at a point past the centre of the player's body. The body should not be allowed to turn so much after the racket has made the stroke, and finished its swing, as in the case of the cross-court shot, since the racket should follow along the direction in which the ball has been struck in all shots where follow through is used. In the latter case the racket must leave the line of the ball's flight sooner than in the stroke across the body, since in this former stroke the sweep of the racket goes round the body in a more circular plane than in the latter, when it should finish high up and above the player's head. The wrist should be



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8. FOREHAND STROKE ACROSS COURT. BEGINNING OF  
FORWARD SWING OF THE RACKET

Note the firm wrist, and head of the racket supported above it. The weight of the body is on the back foot; the position of the body is tense, with the feet correctly placed for the shot which will be directed across the body to the opponent's forehand court.





*Graflex*

# 9. FOREHAND STROKE ACROSS COURT. FINISH OF FOLLOW THROUGH OF THE RACKET

Note good use of body weight, as evidenced by the turned shoulders, and transference of weight from right to left foot as the racket arm has come round in its swing.

The wrist has been turned over at end of the follow through to ease the muscles of the forearm. N.B.—The wrist is quite firm and the whole of the arm quite straight during the swing and its finish,



even more tense and firm than for the cross-court shot, since control and accuracy are most important.

Thus the left shoulder will be used less definitely, and the body not turned at the hips so freely at the finish of the swing. This stroke should be made when the ball is at the top of its bound, but with more of a pushing action from the forearm, in order to direct the ball more away from, than across, the body. The racket should finish its follow through above the player's head rather than round his shoulder as in the cross-court shot.

### **Difficulties and Remedies.**

At first the beginner will find this shot easier than the other ; but when he has learned to use his left shoulder in the swing of the racket, and lost the tendency to hit instead of swing at the ball, this shot will be far more difficult for him to play correctly. He must remember that the front foot should be placed rather nearer to the line of the ball's flight than the back foot, that the ball should be taken later, and struck with a more restrained swing, than in the stroke

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across his body. The correct position of the feet and the pushing action of the forearm are the distinguishing characteristics of the stroke. The ball should always be struck as far away from the player's body as is possible, without loss of balance and completely straightening the arm, which should always be slightly bent at the elbow.

The beginner's chief difficulties will be found to be a tendency to take the ball too low, and then to cut it; to play the shot with his body square to the net, and so to lose his balance, and put his weight, not in a forward direction towards the line of the ball's flight, but away from it with a backward inclination of his body, thus causing loss of power and mistiming.

He must always remember that the temptation to relax his wrist, and so allow the head of his racket to fall below the level of his hand, is the most common fault to which beginners are liable, and so must be avoided beyond all others. The neglect of this point causes many faults, and ruins the value of the stroke completely, since the ball cannot be struck at a correct distance away from the player's body; the slack wrist causes loss of control; the swing is spoiled,



*Graflex*

#### 10. FOREHAND STROKE DOWN THE LINE

Note position of the front foot, which has been placed more across the line of the ball's flight than for the cross-court shot. Also the swing is not quite similar in other respects, since the forearm is used more with a pushing action, and the follow through finishes above the player's head. The ball in this photograph will travel in a direction at right angles to the player's body. Note firm wrist and body weight transferred from right to left foot as the ball is leaving the racket.



since no longer can the player feel that his racket is a part of his arm, as in fact it becomes with the wrist muscles tense, and so have the control that results therefrom.

## BACKHAND STROKE

This stroke is to the beginner the most difficult, because more complex, the most unnatural, because more awkward, of all the shots of the game. To the player who has mastered certain peculiarities of grip of the racket, correct position of the feet, and use of the body in making the swing by means of which the power of the stroke is obtained, the shot becomes as easy and delightful of execution as before it appeared complicated and full of difficulties. Thus the reason for the beginner's lack of success at it may probably be found in the diffidence with which he approaches it, since, unlike its counterpart on the other wing, its difficulties are very apparent and have to be faced from the very beginning.

### The Grip

The first difficulty will be found in acquiring the correct grip for the stroke. The beginner

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must remember that for this stroke his wrist and elbow joint will be employed in a different manner than for the forehand shot.

This difference of movement will affect the position of the hand in the manner in which the racket is held, and the style in which the stroke is produced. Thus the two grips differ less as to the "holds" themselves than as to the methods with which each is employed.

The correct method of grip for the backhand shot is exactly similar to the way a lady holds up her hand-glass before her face.

Hold the racket up in this manner, and imagine yourself looking straight through the strings.

If the racket has been picked up in the manner described, the handle will be found to be lying diagonally across the hand, from the first joint of the forefinger to the pad of the hand.

The thumb, which may be placed across, or lie along, the handle, holds it in position by pressing it against the fingers, which also grasp it, and the pad of the hand.

The forefinger should now be allowed to separate slightly from the others, to allow the handle to rest in its bent second joint. This will be found to allow of more flexibility of wrist



*Graflex*

### 11. BACKHAND GRIP. FRONT VIEW

Note forefinger separated from the others to give more ease in the oblique grip of the hand across the handle.

The hold of the handle is firm without being rigid by virtue of this grip, and flexibility of the wrist and touch are also obtained by it.





Graflex

## 12. BACKHAND GRIP. BACK VIEW

Note position of the thumb, which is generally placed *along* and not, as in the author's hold, *across* the handle. The wrist is always tense, with the muscles at the base of the hand flexed, to enable the head of the racket to be supported above the hand. Note line of racket and arm.



movement than if this finger was held rigidly closed round the handle, the lower end of which at the butt should press against a spot in the pad of the hand, about midway between the wrist and the base of the little finger.

The chief hold on the handle is exercised by the thumb and the bent forefinger, while the other fingers are used more as controlling than holding agents. The thumb's pressure, which is exerted along (or across) the handle, keeps and holds it against the forefinger, keeps the handle firmly held, and at the same time allows of the greatest freedom of wrist, owing to the easy nature of the grasp by the rest of the fingers.

If the thumb is placed along the handle some flexibility of wrist may be lost ; but as security and control of the racket are most important in the production of this stroke, a certain amount of freedom can be sacrificed in order to obtain them. And the thumb along, rather than across, the handle means greater accuracy for that very reason.

N.B.—Never allow the butt of the handle to rest in the palm of the hand. This grip entirely prevents the racket and arm from becoming one, as it were, which is the main advantage of the

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grip described above; it destroys entirely accuracy and control even with players with the strongest wrists; and in every case, with one exception, is entirely unsuited for volleying.

So the beginner is more than strongly advised to have nothing to do with this method of holding the racket, called the "long hold."

### **The Stroke**

In learning this stroke the beginner should remember that correct footwork, in this case preparatory footwork, and body swing play a far larger part in its success than is the case with the shot on the other side of the body. Since the elbow joint and wrist cannot be so freely used for shots made across the body, the stroke must rely for its timing upon the player's footwork (in the use of the feet in transferring the weight of the body while the stroke is being produced), and for its speed and smoothness of movement upon his ability to use to the best advantage the weight of his body as the ball is struck.

The beginner should turn his body in the sideways position to the net, with his feet comfortably apart, and parallel to it.





*Griffex*

13. BACKHAND STROKE. SWING BACK OF THE  
RACKET

The swing is a little shorter than usual, and the shoulders are not doing very much towards giving power to the shot. Note firm wrist, kept well down, and the head of the racket, as a result, supported above the hand. Weight on ball of left foot, and shoulders level.

The backward swing of the racket should be as flat and parallel with the ground as possible ; the forward swing should be made along the same path, and in an exactly similar manner in order to meet the ball, which should be hit at a slightly lower point (since control of high-bounding balls is difficult on this wing) than for the forehand stroke—namely, at a point a little below the line of the waist, and opposite to the middle of the player's body.

The ball should be taken as far away from the player's body as is comfortable without loss of balance or the complete straightening of the elbow joint—both of which faults result in loss of power and spoil the speed of the stroke.

As the racket goes back for the backward swing, the player's weight should be upon his back foot, from which it should be transferred as the racket comes forward and makes the stroke, completely passing on to the front foot as the racket completes the follow through at the finish.

The left shoulder will be found to be of great use in helping to turn the player's body as he makes this shot, since most of the power of the stroke is obtained by this rotary movement from the hips, and the right shoulder alone is not

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so powerful as the two together. The beginner should always remember to allow the racket to follow through freely at the end of the stroke. It will be found to finish well out above his right shoulder in the stroke across the court, and rather higher above his head for the shot down the line. The player should also allow his left foot to leave the ground as soon as the stroke is completed, in order to encourage still further the follow through of the racket. By this means he will be enabled to turn his body more easily at the end of the stroke, and follow up the shot to the net immediately it has been completed. At the beginning of the stroke the left shoulder, head, and right shoulder should be in the same straight line.

The beginner should note that his wrist should be kept absolutely tense and braced as the ball is struck, and by the flexing of the muscles the head of the racket should be supported just above the hand to obtain accuracy and control in the stroke.

### THE SERVICE

The majority of Lawn Tennis players in England of the past generation had been accustomed



*Graflex*

14. BACKHAND STROKE. HALFWAY THROUGH THE  
STROKE

The wrist is quite firm, and the head of the racket kept in the horizontal, as it swings outward, and round. The body weight has just been transferred from the left to right foot; but the shoulders have not done much to give power to the shot.



to bring far too little imagination or originality into their methods of playing the game. This fact was especially noticeable in the neglect by so many of the first-class players of that period of the possibilities of spin and swerve in the service. So that when H. Ward and Dwight Davis first introduced their kicking service, at that time an absolutely unknown thing, to our best players, it found them all, with the exception of the Doherty brothers, entirely unprepared, and unable to deal with it. Next Dr. Eaves, and N. E. Brookes in Australia, further modified and adapted this service, by adding more pace with a lessened kick. Once more the English players were defeated through inability to find a counter to this changed attack.

Thus the English player, whose power of imitation appears to have been more marked than his inventive genius, applied himself either to the mastery of one straightforward delivery, which was fast or slow, swerving or straight, according to his physique or temperament. In hardly any instance was spin or break employed of design in relation to the opponent's weaknesses, so much so that the whole thing

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appeared to be rather a means of merely starting the game than a very valuable weapon for controlling it. Now the beginner, with this history of mediocrity before his eyes, should not be tempted to try anything very enterprising at the start, but confine himself to learning a service well produced, and of a character best suited to his natural capabilities. After which he will be better able to appreciate the refinements at which his predecessors stopped short, when he has acquired a sound basis to work upon. The type of delivery that most generally answers to this description is the plain swerving service of good length and low bound, which will be found to be of great use for all overhead strokes employed later on in the course of the game. Since it is a Lawn Tennis truism, "as one serves, one smashes," the beginner should bear in mind all that has gone before with regard to the work done by the feet and shoulders towards the smooth production of the strokes. For upon the correct position of the feet and turning of the shoulders depends that transference of the weight from one foot to the other in the course of the stroke which gives power, control, and rhythmical smoothness to the whole movement. The





*Graflex*

15. SERVICE. SWING BACK OF RACKET AND THROW-UP  
OF BALL

The ball has been thrown up rather high, and the body appears to be bent too far back. The weight is on both feet and will be transferred as the ball is hit. The shoulders should be more level; and the right heel should not have been lifted from the ground until the ball has been struck.

player should hold his racket with a firm hold, as for the forehand stroke ; he should stand with his body turned sideways to the net, with his right foot parallel to the base-line and the left in a natural position a little way in front of it.

The weight of the body should be upon the back foot at the beginning of the backward swing of the racket and the start of the stroke, and transferred to the front foot in the course of the stroke until it is completed. The right shoulder, from the original sideways position to the net, should turn still further, if possible, to allow the right arm to take back the racket in the course of the backward swing. The head and shoulders will then be in a straight line, and at right angles to the net just before the forward motion of the racket arm begins. This motion should be in a semicircular downward direction, after the racket has been swung up to the full extent of the server's arm, but without straightening the elbow joint to meet the ball.

The ball should be hit at a point above the right ear as conveniently high as possible without undue stretching of the server's arm, and with the wrist as flexible as possible without loosening the firmness of the grip.

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As the racket begins to come round in its sweep, the body should be made to turn from the hips, by the help of the left (or unemployed) shoulder, which should at the end of the stroke be turned farther away from the net than the other in the course of the body's rotation. The beginner must remember this point in order to get power with smoothness into the stroke. He will also find that the balance of his body will be considerably assisted if he extends the left arm after it has thrown up the ball.

The racket should finish the swing outside and just above the left knee in this type of service. The right foot, as in the forehand stroke, may now be lifted, and swung forward into the court after (but never before) the ball has been hit, and the weight of the body transferred to the left. This will be found to help the follow through of the racket, and enable the server, if he desires to do so, to get in quickly to the net. The beginner must learn, if he is not a golfer, and should note if he is one, that the amount of pace imparted to all strokes depends upon the speed of the racket at the moment it meets the ball. Therefore all the more let him be careful, if he would accelerate



*Graflex*

16. SERVICE. AFTER THE BALL HAS BEEN STRUCK

Note body weight has been transferred from right to left foot; the arm and wrist are quite firm; the racket will finish its swing outside the player's right knee in this type of delivery, but the shoulders have not been kept sufficiently level, which may spoil the accuracy of the stroke.







*Graflex*

### 17. SERVICE. FINISH OF THE FOLLOW THROUGH

In this type of delivery the racket finishes outside the player's left knee. Note the rotation of the right shoulder, which has come right round with the arm, the transference of the body weight from the right to left foot, and the level shoulders.

the quickness of the forward movement of his racket, to do so without jerkiness or unevenness of the swing, which must be smooth and rhythmical in order to deliver a true, hard blow. The whole stroke, like the overhead smash, gets its speed from the correct timing of the various movements of which it is made up. A great part of the actual power of the blow itself is obtained from the movement of straightening the elbow joint at the moment of hitting the ball (as in the action of throwing), some is derived from the correct distribution of the body weight, and the rest comes from the qualities of accurate timing and correct methods of making the stroke ; in other words, good “ eye ” and good style.

When he learns the overhead service, the beginner will find his greatest difficulty in the very first action he has to make in order to produce the shot, i.e. that of throwing up the ball. He should practise this with his left hand (as a juggler would) until he can throw up the ball with the same strength and in the same line as often as he likes. For upon the player's ability to do this with unfailing accuracy every time depends his ability to acquire a consistent

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and powerful service. Inability to do this action correctly has been the most frequent cause of failure to make two services alike, since the ball to be hit does not arrive at the same height or place on two consecutive occasions.

His next fault will probably come from not keeping his weight firmly on the back foot until the ball has been struck and the follow through of the racket begun.

This will cause the right shoulder to droop and the body to sway as the racket comes forward in its swing. Both faults will spoil the stroke ; but the swaying body is the more fatal to the player's chances of hitting the ball true.

Another fault of which beginners are guilty is the habit of trying to hit the ball without the correct swing forwards to meet it.

In no circumstances should the speed of the racket be increased with a jerk or uneven motion of the arm or wrist ; but only by quickening the swing forward of the racket by smooth and even acceleration of the arm, which should be distributed all through the forward swing and reach its climax as the ball is struck.



18. SERVICE. A DIFFERENT POSITION

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**SMASH**

This stroke is one that the beginner will find as difficult as any in the game to play well, since the footwork that leads up to and prepares for the shot itself is the essential factor that makes for its success. This again depends upon the accuracy of the player's judgment, which can only be based upon experience and developed by practice. Thus the difficulties of the beginner can be understood in advance, but for all that they must not be allowed to deter him from learning the correct method of playing the stroke, which later on he can perfect by practice.

As a rule one finds the best servers are not necessarily to be found among the best players of the overhead shots (although the converse is much more likely to be true); instead they are much more certain to be discovered among those players whose footwork is their strongest point. Quick-footed players move into position early for their strokes, and so make their shots as easy as possible by being ready for them in advance. This quality, which is possessed in the highest degree by all good volleyers, is displayed less

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in the making of difficult strokes from impossible positions than in making every shot as easy as possible by being in the best position to play it before it arrives.

So it is safe to assume that a man who smashes well will serve well, since the latter stroke requires no preparatory footwork and is made from a stationary position behind the base-line.

But for the smash all the difficulties experienced by the beginner in acquiring a service (with the exception of that of throwing up the ball) will have to be overcome, and in addition quickness of mind and foot will have to be learned as well.

In all other respects the same rules apply for the smash as were laid down for the service ; and if the beginner has been successful in acquiring a good method for this latter stroke, he will find the overhead smash not more difficult to make when once he is in the position to produce it.

Where he had to throw up the ball in the one case, he will in the other be called upon to make his own position under the ball to produce the stroke. Thus he will have to exercise his judgment to know how to place himself correctly for the shot, and by means of his quickness of



*Graflex*

### 19. SMASH. FOREHAND

Note the body weight appears to have been transferred from back to front foot at the correct moment. The wrist is quite firm and although the arm appears rather too straight, the ball has been timed well, and the balance generally is good.



foot get to that place and then make the stroke correctly.

The stroke must not be hurried, and should be made with the weight transferred correctly from the back to the front foot as the racket finishes the stroke. This can only be done if the player's position before the stroke has been begun is exactly correct. Otherwise the body weight can never be put into the stroke, which thereby loses in speed and power.

### **Difficulties of the Stroke**

The beginner's chief difficulties will be found to arise from his failure to get into position early enough to make the stroke smoothly and without hurry.

His inability to do this will cause him to take the ball in the wrong position, to hurry the swing of his racket, to lose his balance, or at any rate to fail to put any body swing into the stroke, and in general to make a mistimed, hurried shot. The beginner should not forget that he is apt to lose control of the ball when he runs in to make an overhead shot. He either overhits it into the net through too much

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confidence, or drives it into the stop-netting through forgetting his own momentum as he runs in to hit it.

All these faults, again, will tend to be accentuated by the climatic conditions of sun and wind, since the ball is naturally more affected by the latter the higher it is hit above the court, while the player himself is handicapped by the former when he has to make his strokes with a strong light full in his eyes.

### **BACKHAND SMASH**

This stroke has fallen out of fashion of recent years amongst first-class players. One no longer sees the high lob or deep shot dealt with severely by a genuine backhand smash, as in the days of the late H. S. Mahony, H. L. Doherty of the older generation, or of M. Decaugis amongst modern players.

It would appear that present-day players do not care to risk the stroke, and are content to get the ball back for a more favourable opportunity to kill from an easier position.

However, the stroke that now takes its place is at its worst a kind of defensive push volley, at





*Graflex*

## 20. BACKHAND STROKE ACROSS THE COURT

The ball has just been struck, and the racket is completing its swing with the help of the right shoulder. Note firm wrist and the racket head supported above the wrist. Weight of body transferred from left to right foot.





*Graflex*

## 21. BACKHAND STROKE DOWN THE LINE

Note the finish of the stroke, which is high, and the rather more restrained swing round of the shoulders. Position of feet is correct.

its best not a backhand stroke at all, although made on that side of the player's head.

The stroke is a compromise borrowed from the sister game of Badminton. It is a cleverly produced shot made with the forehand movement of the racket and arm and considerable bend of the body, by means of which the ball is taken above the left side of the head, and hit with a sweeping action of the forearm round the head.

The backhand stroke, however, pure and simple, is very useful, and, although difficult, should be learned by the beginner.

Although players may be able by excessive agility to avoid its use, and so shirk its difficulties, they will sooner or later be caught by some well-placed lob or deep shot into their backhand court. Moreover, the cultivation of the stroke is helpful for making all volleys on the left side of the body, since it demands extremely careful footwork, free use of the arm and shoulders, and good body balance for its production.

But the player must form his judgment quickly and act upon it at once, since the essential point for its success is quick preparatory footwork.

## The Stroke

To make the stroke correctly, the player should be in the sideways position of his body to the net, the feet should be parallel to it and comfortably separated. The ball should be hit at a point as high as possible (without entirely straightening the elbow) slightly in front of the body, and at a point in the air just outside an imaginary line drawn perpendicularly upwards from a point midway between the feet. The racket should be held in the backhand grip, and the thumb should always be placed straight down the handle to give control. The stroke should be made by means of the forearm, helped by the left shoulder, which should be used to turn the racket arm and shoulder, and make the body rotate slightly at the hips, in order to help the swing. The wrist should be very firm and locked as the racket meets the ball, since if it is allowed to turn over on the ball as the stroke is taking place (unless the smash is being made very close to the net) the ball will be smothered and the stroke spoiled. The power in the stroke is derived from accurate timing, free use of the arm and shoulder, body swing, and the pushing



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## 22. BACKHAND SMASH

Note the firm wrist, and forearm thrust forward a little in advance of the racket to give control, and prevent the ball from being smothered into the bottom of the net by the head coming through too soon. The sideways position of the body is correct, and the weight should be all on the left foot until the ball is struck.



power of the forearm, which forces the racket forward into the stroke.

### **Difficulties of the Beginner**

These will lie first in the production of the stroke, which he will find awkward to make across his body. He will probably forget to throw his arm well out from his side (on no account allow the elbow to touch the side as the shot is made); allow his wrist to turn over with the racket and so smother the ball; omit to use his body weight, or swing at the ball, but try merely to hit it without any back swing of the racket.

But most of his trouble will probably arise from not being in position first of all to make the stroke in the correct way. The shot is bound to fail if the preparatory footwork has not enabled the beginner to get the most favourable position for the movements described, and he is therefore compelled to play the stroke without observing any or all of them.

### **THE VOLLEY**

This stroke of all others is the most attractive in execution and quick in its results. Since the

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making of it is as pleasing as its success, if well made, is instantaneous. It appeals more directly to the artist at the game, as well as to all players whose temperament inclines them to quick results rather than to protracted endings. As an artistic method of giving the *coup de grâce* to an opponent's stroke it is unequalled. Moreover, it is a most effective way to clinch an advantage worked for by the more plodding, and less showy, work of the ground strokes that have preceded it. Its attractiveness is great, but the beginner must not be tempted to use it at all times and on all occasions, since it can be, to the player who has not acquired sound ground strokes, "a good friend, but a bad master." There are three ordinary varieties of this stroke, forehand and backhand, in the high and low volley, and the overhead shot. The overhead volley has been dealt with under the smash, so we need not mention it further, except to lay stress once again upon the value of the preparatory footwork, and upon attention to the grip, which must be changed for the strokes on either wing, and above all upon the accurate use of the wrist, which must be braced, as in all volleys, to meet the impact of the racket and ball.





*Graflex*

### 23. FOREHAND VOLLEY. LOW BALL

Note head of the racket supported on a level with the wrist, which is tense and braced to take the shock of the ball. Feet are firm on the ground, and the right knee is very slightly bent to allow the player to get down to the low shots.

## Forehand Volley

For this stroke the player's position is the key-note to success. The player can make all the strokes of the game more or less easy by attention to his position in the court at the time of playing the ball. For these strokes there is one, and only one, place in the court from which the player can best make the shot—the success of which the beginner should remember will vary directly, in all cases, with the player's proximity to the net, since the essence of all good volleying is to hit the ball down, rather than up over the net, whenever he can. Moreover, since the ball is met nearer to the net, and sooner after the opponent has hit it, the player will be compelled to employ greater judgment and a power of anticipation in order to gauge the probable direction of the ball, and thus get the best position for making the stroke.

The stroke is made with the body in the side-ways position to the net, with the feet comfortably apart, and the weight, which is hardly ever used in the stroke, equally distributed between them. The grip of the racket should be as for the forehand shot, and the wrist must

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never be slack, nor the racket loosely held, since in the former case the impact of the racket and ball cannot be met correctly, and in the latter the racket will turn in the hand and a mis-hit shot will result. Therefore grip the handle firmly, but not rigidly, and keep the head of the racket supported above the wrist, by flexing the wrist muscles, in order to gain more control in the stroke. The shot itself must be made without any swing of the racket, which should gain its power from the pushing action of the forearm and wrist (which must always be locked for all volleys), its accuracy from the supported head of the racket, and its speed from the pace of the ball as it comes to the player's racket.

Again let the beginner be careful to keep his wrist tense and firm as the racket meets the ball, which should be met with the full face of the racket, whenever possible, and controlled by a slight drawing action of the racket in a downward direction, and across the line of the ball's flight, at the moment the ball is hit.

Of course for low volleys it will be necessary to slope the face of the racket away from the line of the ball's flight, in order to lift it over the net, but the ball should be struck in the same



*Graflex*

#### 24. FOREHAND VOLLEY

The forearm is very tense and the wrist braced to receive the shock of the ball, which has just been struck.

Note very firm wrist and head of the racket horizontal.



manner in each case in making the actual shot, at whatever elevation it may be necessary to hit it.

### **Difficulties of the Beginner**

The beginner will probably feel tempted to play the shot with his body square to the net; this is bad because although the incorrect position does not completely spoil the stroke itself, its field of direction is greatly narrowed by the impossibility of hitting the ball in any but a forward direction unless the player's body is turned sideways for the stroke. He will be tempted to swing at the ball, and lose control; he will forget to keep the head of the racket up above the wrist, and so lose accuracy; he will allow his wrist to be slack; and if he has played much squash rackets will hold the racket too loosely for all his shots; and finally take his volleys too close to his body.

### **BACKHAND VOLLEY**

The backhand volley is at once easier and more difficult than its counterpart on the forehand side. It is easier to make, when once the player

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has got into position for the stroke, because the wrist and arm are more firmly and easily controlled for the backhand shots than for those on the other side. It is more difficult, because the preparatory footwork to gain this correct volleying position demands much more attention, and is far more difficult to acquire without much practice and experience.

The sideways position of the player's body to the net must always be obtained, otherwise the player will have to make the stroke with his arm extended across his body, and thereby lose in reach and freedom of movement. To neglect this point is bad for the ground strokes, but fatal for those in the air, since speed and direction will be lost, even if the stroke is possible to produce at all.

### **The Stroke**

To make the stroke the player should be in the sideways position to the net, with his feet comfortably apart, and his weight equally distributed between them. The racket should not swing back, nor follow through when the stroke is completed, nor is the weight of the

body put into the stroke, which obtains its power through the pushing action of the forearm and elbow, its control through the agency of the locked wrist and the head of the racket supported above the hand, and its speed (as in all volleys) from the pace of the ball as it arrives from the opponent's racket.

The racket arm should not be fully extended, and the wrist must be tense and braced to take up the impact of the racket as it meets the ball.

In addition the player's wrist should never turn the racket over on the ball in the course of the stroke, since all volleys should be struck as much as possible with the full face of the racket, with the head supported a little above the wrist, in order to give better control. The racket should be held in the ordinary backhand grip with the thumb placed down the handle; this will be found to help control the head of the racket, and give that stability to the stroke which makes the backhand volley more reliable, when correctly produced, than that on the other side of the body.

The beginner should always remember that all volleys, with one exception, should be played with very little take back, and follow through,

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of the racket. The stroke should be made rather by means of a pushing motion of the forearm and racket, which is, at the moment the ball is struck, kept perfectly firm, and should meet the ball full face.

The one exception is the drive volley, which is treated exactly like the stroke off the ground, as far as footwork, back swing, and follow through are concerned. The one thing to be noted in this stroke is never to spare the shot, but to hit it hard, and follow right through with the racket afterwards.

### **Difficulties in Making the Shot**

The beginner will find many difficulties in this shot, some of which will be caused by an incorrect position on the court when he attempts the stroke.

For no other stroke of the game is position so important as for the volleys. By obtaining a good volleying position, a point four or five feet from the net, the beginner can make nearly every volley, except the shots attempted from the fastest and lowest drives, at least 40 per cent. easier, since he will be far better placed for

## DIFFICULTIES IN MAKING THE SHOT 63

hitting down into his opponent's court than if he were farther back in his own. Note : all volleys should be hit down or flat, never upwards unless it is impossible to avoid having to do so.

Again, the beginner will find himself very often producing the stroke without bending the knees, especially in making his low volleys ; he will also discover how much more difficult it is to volley on this side of his body, unless he makes a point of always getting into the sideways position before he makes the stroke. And finally, unless he keeps his wrist very firmly braced when the racket meets the ball, he will either mis-hit or mistime it, and it will drop in a lifeless manner off his racket.

### HALF-VOLLEY

The half-volley is a stroke which no player should be encouraged to attempt until his foot-work is perfectly sound and his method of playing the game cannot be corrupted by bad habits. Therefore the stroke should not come under the category of shots for learners of the game, since the process of acquiring it may do more harm than good. It may be defined in its narrowest

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meaning as a stroke between a volley and a ground shot; since the player hits the ball before he has obtained a second sight of it, and after it has bounced. He makes the shot therefore rather at the place where he thinks the ball will be, rather than at the ball itself. This stroke may take place early, or late, immediately after the ball has pitched, or quite late on its rise; the essential characteristic of the stroke is that the actual shot is made on faith without a pause in the racket's swing after the stroke has begun. Thus there are numerous varieties of the shot which can range from an opponent's smash picked up at the player's feet—the *tour de force* of the alert volleyer—to the slashing drives of the Continental player, made at the pitch of the ball, and at every height of its bound. The most frequent example of the stroke is seen when the server in a man's doubles is running in towards the net, receives the ball too short to volley on the bound, and too deep to hit, either through the excellence of the opponent's return or his own slowness in coming in, and is forced to attempt a compromise which results in the shot described above. In this position in the court the beginner should never

intentionally try it, as it is of its nature difficult to control, being too fast probably to lift sufficiently to get over the net and keep in court, and in addition is an upward-hit shot, which should be avoided as much as possible in a doubles game. Another often-used example of the half-volley is the shot as made in the "no man's land" area of the court, when the inexperienced player has been caught by a quick return of his opponent, or left in a half-hearted effort on his own part to get to the net.

Here the stroke is only used to enable the player to escape from an awkward position. Needless to say, both varieties are not to be recommended for the beginner's use, and would never have been brought to his notice in these pages had not the certainty of their occurring at some time or another in practice justified some warning against their deliberate use, and only when no other stroke can possibly be attempted.

## How to Make the Stroke

The stroke should be played with the greatest attention to the racket's swing, before and in

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the course of the shot. The wrist should be kept quite firm for both backhand and forehand varieties of the stroke; and the ball should be watched very closely in its flight, and hit as soon after it has pitched as possible, since the earlier the stroke is made the easier it becomes to control and direct.

The racket should go back to some extent in a backward swing, as—unlike the volley, for which there should generally be no swing back—the stroke is made with some swing and follow through, and a certain amount of transference of body weight from one foot to the other in the course of it. The racket should be held as horizontal as possible, and should travel as far as the player can make it do so parallel with the ground, and as much along the line of the ball's flight as the desired direction of the shot will permit. As a general rule the head of the racket should be practically vertical or inclined very slightly towards the direction of the ball's flight. The degree of inclination, however, must vary with the striker's position in court when he makes the stroke and the moment at which he hits the ball. The beginner will thus find cross-court drives are more safely returned with this stroke to

the court from which the ball arrived, while the straight-line shots will go back with more certainty by a stroke that exactly follows the line of the ball's flight, i.e. in a direction parallel to the side-lines of the court. The body should as far as possible be turned in the sideways position to the net as in the other strokes ; and since quickness in making the shot when close to the net is more important than the amount of speed imparted to the ball, excessive attention to the employment of the body weight is less important, and may even be discouraged. G. A. Caridia in his younger days was the finest exponent of this stroke, from every position on the court. In his case the racket was held braced very firmly across the wrist, which was never allowed to bend for any shot on the backhand side. The control of the ball on this wing was in consequence better than that on his forehand, which was made in many cases with a more flexible wrist. This increased the area of direction, but lessened the amount of control that the shots on this side possessed. Caridia's footwork was always excellent. His preparatory work to enable him to get into position was, owing to his playing position in court (about five feet

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inside the base-line), necessarily not exhausting although very accurate; by the correct distribution and use of his body weight, his strokes were produced perfectly, and with a very great amount of speed and power. His play is an example to be admired but never copied by any inexperienced player of the game, until his footwork is sound and his strokes correctly produced.

The too frequent use of the stroke will induce bad habits in players who are in the learning stage, and spoil their sense of position in court. Moreover, on our grass courts in England such a stroke should be left as a general rule for exceptional circumstances, since a perfect surface and a constant bound are the first requisites for the true playing of the shot, which is better employed on covered courts than on other surfaces.

### **DROP SHOT**

The drop shot is another stroke which should not be included in the category for beginners. For this stroke can only be mastered by means of perfect timing and touch, two qualities that come last, in their perfection, to the learner of the game, and only when he has obtained that

delicate control and power over his own muscles, and through them over the ball to be played.

Thus, although he will find it far too difficult to produce with any degree of success in the early stages of his practice of the game, the beginner should know enough about the stroke to be able to recognize it when he sees it coming.

As he has been warned of the fascination of the half-volley because it is so easy to produce, so he should be advised not to attempt, too soon, the drop shot, because it is so difficult to make successfully. For one of the chief drawbacks to the success of the stroke is the beginner's inability to know the right ball off which to make it. This virtue the experienced player of the stroke nearly always possesses, so that, apart from his power of touch and timing, he will be more likely to succeed when he does play the stroke than if he had made the attempt without the necessary preknowledge of when to do so.

## The Stroke

The stroke should be made with the racket held firmly (never loosely for any stroke) in that

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grip for whichever of the two strokes (back- or forehand) the player wishes to make.

The wrist must be quite flexible, but on no account allowed to become slack, since the racket must be under perfect control and able to be checked at any point in the making of the shot. This will ensure the delicacy of touch and enable the player to make the stroke with the slight drawing action of the racket across the ball as the stroke is made. The racket should meet the ball with a perfectly full face, and the wrist should be used to control and direct the power of the shot as the speed and height of bound of the ball make it necessary. This again is a matter for the player's judgment, but as a rule the faster the ball the more the wrist should be used to control the racket as it meets it, and the more sharply the face should be drawn across it as the ball is struck.

The ball should be hit at the top of its bound and at a point just above its equator with the downward, drawing movement of the racket mentioned above. There is very little swing back of the racket, and no weight of the body in the stroke, which is made solely with the arm and wrist. The racket, therefore, does not

follow through after the ball has been hit, but should be checked by the controlling action of the wrist and forearm.

By the use of the wrist, delicacy of touch and the concealment of the player's intention until the last moment are obtained. Both these qualities are essential for the success of the shot, in which the elements of finesse and surprise are the main characteristics.

Enough has been written to convince the beginner of the shot's difficulties, which will be far more easily explained by a practical illustration than by much reading.

Therefore an intelligent study of Mrs. Larcombe's or Miss Ryan's method of playing this shot should put the learner on the right path. The rest is practice, and of course the correct application of the knowledge he has absorbed from watching their execution of the stroke, together with the small amount of assistance he may have obtained by reading these remarks.

## THE CHOP STROKE

This stroke, which is sure to be found in the repertory of every champion's shots, should be

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approached with caution by the beginner in the early stages of his practice.

For, on account of the ease of its production, and its tendency, when acquired, to induce bad habits, it has been placed in the category of strokes which the beginner should understand, but the practice of which he had better defer to a later stage in his progress.

The reasons for explaining, while denying it to the beginner until he has become thoroughly well grounded in the other strokes, are three: (i) The method of making the shot is quite opposed to that of the orthodox stroke of the game, which is hit with either a full-faced blow or with top spin. (ii) The importance of stationary footwork, position of the feet, and body swing, so essential to the correctly produced strokes, is of very little account in its production, since the stroke is made mainly by the forearm alone, helped of course by the wrist at the moment of the racket's impact with the ball. All the vital points of stroke production are thus neglected in this shot, which consequently would be bad practice for the novice trying to acquire the others. (iii) The shot itself is too slow, owing to the undercut imparted

to the ball. This cut slows up its flight through the air, as well as checks its speed off the ground.

Although its value as an auxiliary stroke cannot be too highly rated, yet it should never be allowed to have any other place in the player's list of shots. In addition, until the learner has acquired, beyond any chance of corruption, the best method of making his strokes with swing and the full face of his racket, he should never be allowed to indulge in experiments, which can only tend, if tried too early, to spoil his style for the best strokes of the game.

Its value is undoubted, since it is a good variant for a player's ordinary shots : it is very useful in breaking up the length of the consistent driver ; for blocking a fast service on the rise ; for dealing with the drives of a hard-hitting base-line player, with balls that come slowly through the air and off the ground—a double advantage to the net player, since he is enabled to get up to the net while his chop shot is in flight to his opponent, whose return is cramped by its hang off the ground and its slow bound when it has pitched. Thus his drive becomes less speedy, and the volleyer obtains the addi-

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tional advantage of time to get into position, by one and the same device.

And finally, for cramping the top-spin drives of the inveterate player of this stroke the shot has no equal if used with discrimination.

Its chief value in attack is in doubles play, where length of stroke is not so important, but where a net position is vital, and when the shots must be low, hit hard, and yet kept within the confines of the court.

In singles, except in the cases quoted above, or on a wet court, or as a last resort of the losing player to try something new, its general use can never be recommended.

To make the stroke the player, holding his racket with the ordinary forehand grip, should hit the ball, taken if possible at the height of the waist, with a downward chopping movement of the racket, made by the help of the forearm and wrist, at an angle of about forty-five degrees to its line of flight. Neither body swing nor follow through of the racket is required; but the stroke is made more easily if the player's body is turned sideways to the net, to enable the full value of the downward chop to be imparted to the ball, and also to allow the player

more freedom and a wider area of direction for his stroke. The ball should be hit almost exactly at a point on its equator (if taken waist high) and opposite the player's left foot, advanced about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  feet in front of the right. The stroke should be made rather more in front of, and closer to, the body than in the case of the other shots which employ body swing and depend for their power on the swing and follow through of the racket.

The wrist at the moment that the racket hits the ball should be quite tense and rigid in order to stop the racket's downward progress. The full effect of the shot will not be obtained unless the racket is thus checked in its downward direction immediately it has met the ball, which thus leaves the racket with the spin imparted to it by this chopping action of the stroke.

## **STROKES AND TACTICS AND THEIR RELATION TO ONE ANOTHER**

The subject-matter of this heading may appear a little premature, or even out of place in this book, which should deal with the more elementary principles of the game. However, the writer

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feels that the beginner cannot start too early to think, as well as to act, and so has ventured to attempt, with the aid of one or two examples, to explain some points in tactics which might not be out of place in a more advanced work.

It is a truism, only partly recognized, to say that there should be a close relation between strokes and tactics; that the means should have a definite purpose with regard to the end in view. Yet to many players this apparently clear relation does not appear so obvious, while to others, judging from their methods, it has never occurred at all. One sees too often the endless rallies between two players, whose strokes appear to be made with no other design than to get the ball over the net and, through the boredom or exhaustion of an opponent, to win the point.

The beginner may think (if he happens to be one of the humble ones) that, until he can play most of the shots previously explained in this book with unfailing regularity, he should not give much thought to the less obvious side of the game.

That, in fact, he would be better employed with the physical movements of stroke-making

than with the mental processes of working out their relation to the tactics which depend upon them.

But in reality the beginner should begin to think about tactics and the relation of his strokes to his plan of campaign, with an eye at the same time upon his opponent's weaknesses, as soon as he feels he can produce all the strokes with sufficient certainty and ease to play an opponent in a singles match.

There are a few obvious examples of this relation of strokes and tactics which can best illustrate the writer's meaning, even if the strokes themselves may at the moment be beyond the beginner's capacity. For example, an American service, delivered to the opponent's backhand in his left court, calls for the return by the striker-out across the court to the server's backhand side. This return is generally expected by the server, as he runs in to volley at the net, and so he guards his left side of the court. The striker-out, therefore, wishes to change the direction of his return shot, and play it down the line to the server's forehand side, a far more difficult stroke to attempt, and one which is less likely to be successful.

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Thus the server, by guarding his own left side, can force the striker-out to run this risk every time he (the server) sends down this delivery into the striker's left court. The striker-out, after taking frequent risks, will begin to make mistakes, and will have to vary his return, in consequence, with some other shot.

Another very favourite scheme of tactics is that of offering an opponent an apparent advantage, which when taken by him brings immediate disaster with it. This type of tactics in the game of chess, known as a gambit, is well illustrated at Lawn Tennis by playing to an opponent's strong point in order to gain an advantage at a later stage in the rally. Thus, since the direction of his return stroke can be anticipated with a certain degree of accuracy, the player can post himself in the best position to crush it when his opponent has fallen into the trap and played the stroke invited by the player's original shot.

As a well-known international player used to say, "Give me an opponent with a favourite stroke; then play to his strength, but take very good care to be there when he has made his shot, and the point is mine."

Again, if your opponent has appreciably stronger strokes on one side than on the other, and a marked tendency to run round most of the shots directed to his weaker side, it might be considered the obvious thing to attack that side. This, however, is the mistake the novice in tactics would very probably be tempted to make, in his desire to obtain an immediate result from his strokes.

The ultimate consequences of attacking this weaker wing have a twofold disadvantage for the attacker. The opponent gets practice on his weak side and improves thereby, and is still able to run round the ball and exploit his strong shot when he wants to win the point, because the beginner has not first of all prepared the way, as it were, by working him out of position before the winning shot, directed to the weak wing, has been delivered. By playing to his opponent's weakness from the beginning, which his opponent expects and is prepared for, without first of all "opening up the court," or getting his opponent on the run and out of position, the player has lessened the value of his hoped-for winning shot to the vulnerable side, even if he ever gets the opportunity of making it at all.

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There are of course many other similar examples of tactics in relation to the strokes of the game ; but with these three more or less simple examples the beginner should be able to understand the theory of their application to his plan of campaign.

And even if at first he may not be sufficiently proficient in his strokes to attempt them, he can at any rate appreciate their value and the principles which underlie their practice.

### **LADIES' PLAY**

There is so much useful advice that could be given on this subject, and so little space reserved for it, that I am compelled to make a most careful selection of my subject-matter in order to keep within the limit of the following pages.

In order that the advice may be of the most practical value it will be best to point out to beginners the difficulties experienced and the mistakes most generally made in playing the simple strokes of the game ; so that, having learned in previous pages the way to produce these strokes, they may acquire in the following a means to keep them free from faults and bad habits.

For, of course, all that has gone before applies to both sexes alike, since the previous information is mainly composed of points to remember, so fundamental in their nature that they are general, upon which the elements of the game are founded.

Before discussing the strokes, the beginner is advised to obtain the best racket and balls available, and always to make a point of playing with the best possible implements of the game. Her racket ought never to be heavier than  $13\frac{1}{2}$  oz., and should be of an even balance, tightly strung with medium gut. This grade lasts longer than the finer grades, and so has more practical value.

The question of the player's shoes should also have the most careful attention; they should be made to measure and fit quite closely, especially at heel and instep. The lasting qualities of the shoe will be greatly increased if the uppers are made of buckskin, which gives more support to the foot, and has a better appearance, than those shoes with the canvas tops. The small addition to the weight of the shoe is more than compensated for by the improved appearance of the buckskin. The

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soles should be of grey or red rubber of a medium thickness.

As to her dress for the game, it is useless to suggest any particular material or style for the player's consideration, since fashion has decreed that all ladies, of however little skill, shall resemble as far as possible Mademoiselle Lenglen in all other respects when on the court. Hence the one-piece dress and the bandeau round the hair, to quote the things that matter. In the things that matter more, the strokes and style of the present lady champion have been less imitated than admired, mainly owing to that innate quality which defies imitation. However, if the beginner can be induced to see her own mistakes by comparing her own strokes with those of a champion, the difficulties of the shots may become plainer, and the way in which to correct them more apparent.

### **The Service**

In this branch of the game there are at least two important points for the beginner to note :  
(i) The correct manner in which the ball should be thrown up, as to height and direction, for the

service ; (ii) the style in which the stroke should be made from beginning to end of the swing of the racket.

These two actions, when incorrectly made, are undoubtedly the cause of many of the vital faults to which ladies are prone in the overhead service.

Beginners especially are very careless how they throw up the ball for the service. They do this very often with a different action and strength for each service ; so that the ball hardly ever attains the same elevation or arrives at the same spot in the air on any two occasions. Thus they are compelled to hit it at varying positions with regard to their bodies each time the service is produced.

Even then if their balance is not destroyed, and the efficacy of the stroke spoiled, they will never be able to acquire a regular, consistent method of delivering the service, through neglect to practise this action, the most important factor of any towards its successful production.

Then very often beginners fail to obtain the little extra nip off the ground that use of the wrist in service gives to the ball. Failure in this respect is caused by their inability to

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make the wrist play its part in the production of the stroke—very often by having too tight a hold of the handle at the beginning of the service. If the beginner feels that she is not using her wrist at all as the racket comes through its forward swing and meets the ball, she should allow the head of her racket to drop behind her back by slightly easing the closeness of her grip (as in Indian club swinging) at the very end of the back swing and before the forward swing has begun. In this way the wrist will be forced to bring up the head, as the racket is lifted by the arm, to hit the ball.

A frequent cause of mistiming in service is swaying of the body during the backward swing of the racket. This is easily cured by keeping the back foot very firmly on the ground until the ball has been struck.

### **The Overhead Smash**

The worst fault of all beginners of both sexes, but more especially of ladies, when they try this stroke is failure to get into the correct position before attempting to play the ball.

They try the shot too often when the ball is well behind their heads, and the stroke is spoiled. They should always endeavour to get much farther back under the ball than they think will be necessary for the stroke. Then in most cases they will find that they are in the best position for it, and will not have to hurry the swing, or spoil their balance by reaching back beyond their heads to hit the ball at all. In any case a good rule to remember is to have the "body weight" always on the foot farthest away from the ball before the stroke is begun, so that it may be put into the swing of the shoulder and arm in the course of the stroke, and power imparted to the shot. So start early, get into the best position as soon as possible, keep the weight on the back foot from the moment you have got into that position, and watch the ball more closely than you have ever done before, and your smash will be good.

### **The Forehand Stroke**

The beginner usually treats this stroke far too lightly, and it suffers accordingly. The chief faults in its making appear to be a far too

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careless method of stroke-production with all the attendant bad habits. These may be enumerated as follows: body kept square to the net, and leaning backwards away from the ball as the racket hits the ball; feet too close together and side by side generally, instead of in front of one another parallel to the net; and the stroke made too close to the body with a species of scooping action of the racket. With all these bad faults the stroke played in this way is bound to be a failure. If the following suggestions are carried out the stroke will be a success. The beginner can judge for herself by actual practice which is the easier way to proceed; there is no doubt which style produces the better results.

Never be too near the ball; rather miss it (as the late A. F. Wilding used to say to beginners) by being too far away from it; always keep the body turned in the sideways position to the net when making any stroke; never try to hit the ball in a ground stroke without the backward swing of the racket, made with the help of the shoulders as well as of the arm holding the racket.

## The Backhand Stroke

The real stumbling-block of the beginner, and one that is in too few instances properly surmounted. Here again the reason for failure is faulty preparatory footwork which has failed to get the player to within comfortable striking distance of the ball, and a cramped, feeble shot has resulted. Or through incorrect use of the body weight (more than ever valuable in backhand strokes) and absence of swing, the racket does not meet the ball in a free, easy movement, but is hurriedly jerked at it, and a "snatched" shot is produced.

If beginners have acquired the correct grip of the racket and good methods of stroke-production, the chief faults to which they will be liable will result from not being in position early enough for the shot, failure to get the correct sideways position of the body to the net, which results from the first, and a tendency to be too near the ball when the stroke attempted, owing to the more awkward position (across the body) that the arm has to be in when the swing back of the racket is begun. And, moreover, the shots on the backhand require more body

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weight, swing of the racket, and use of the shoulders for their successful production than the others on the forehand side of the body, because every movement is less free and more troublesome to make.

The important points to bear in mind, therefore, are as follows: Get into the sideways position for the stroke as early as possible; thus the stroke will be made without hurry and should be smooth and free. Swing the racket well back in the backward swing, and never increase the speed of the stroke by a jerky or uneven motion of the forward swing, but at an even rate of acceleration distributed all through the swing towards the ball, until it is struck by the racket.

With these few hints and don'ts on the three primary strokes of the game I will close these remarks. Some strokes—the volley, for example—have not been mentioned, but the aim was to discuss the faults, and the remedies for them, of those strokes whose correct production is governed by rules which are fundamental to all the others of the game and so contain the principles that underlie the rest. If the beginner will be enabled to improve her game by the help

of the suggestions contained in these pages, their existence will have been justified, and some assistance given where it was really needed.

## USEFUL HINTS AND POINTS

In the foregoing pages we have dealt with the chief strokes of the game from the beginner's point of view, also with some of the more simple forms of tactics. These subjects have been treated in as simple a manner as possible in order not to confuse the beginner with many rules, but to help him, when possible, to obtain some groundwork and knowledge in correct stroke-production.

I will conclude with some final hints and points, often lost sight of, and put as shortly as possible, which should be useful to all players, experienced or the reverse, who play the game.

### Hints in General

To begin the series, there is nothing better than the trio of time-honoured directions, of which two are invariably neglected by every player to a greater or less degree.

Keep your eye on the ball ; not only when it

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leaves your opponent's racket, is coming over the net, or when it is nearly on your own racket, but watch it, as if you wanted to read the name on it, right up to the moment that your racket hits it.

Concentrate on what you want to do, and don't let your attention be distracted from that for a moment.

Don't fuss or excite yourself over the shot; take it as calmly and quietly as possible. Over-anxiety produces unduly tightened muscles and a cramped stroke. So keep calm and the shot will play itself.

Always play with the best racket and balls; if the good player requires good implements, the inferior performer requires them even more.

Make a vow never to use old or dirty balls; the reason is too obvious to need stating.

Never dispute an umpire's or linesman's decision, however wrong it may appear to be at the time. The umpire is probably in the right more often than not, as he is better placed for seeing all the shots than the players, who should be watching the ball, and not the place where it has pitched. In any case, if the umpire knows his work, you will gain nothing by complaining,

even if you don't prejudice his mind against you for the next doubtful one upon which he has to decide.

Never play slackly or carelessly; if your interest in the game has gone, stop playing as soon as you can without spoiling the sport of the other players. Bad habits are acquired in this way, which later on it will cost you much time and trouble to discard.

Always try to play with players better than yourself; you will then always be trying your hardest, and will learn something while doing so of their game and your own possibilities.

Watch good tennis, but watch it intelligently; keep in mind what it is that you want to learn from the play, and study that in the players. A general impression, which is obtained from a lazy way of watching the game, is no good for analysis of the play.

The unintelligent looker-on sees too much, and gets a clear impression of nothing.

### **Hints for Play and Practice**

Always do your best in practice, and try your hardest—not necessarily to win each game, but

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to strengthen your weak points ; and concentrate on the practice as though you were playing in a match.

While waiting for the ball always support the head of the racket with the unemployed hand. This will relieve your racket arm and wrist, and enable you to adopt whatever grip you want for the shot you have to play.

After you have made your shot, don't remain "planted" on the court ; but try to help your body forwards with the follow through of the racket, by letting the back foot come from the ground, as the racket swings through after the stroke is made.

Remember that the length as well as the speed of all shots should be regulated by the length of the swing back in the first and the speed of the forward swing in the second instance. Never accelerate the speed of the racket unevenly or jerkily, but with a smooth and gradually increasing speed as the ball is struck.

Don't forget to turn over the head of the racket, by turning over the wrist, as the follow through is completed in making all strokes off the ground. This little action has more than the virtue of giving a small degree of top spin

to the ball ; it most distinctly eases the muscles of the forearm, which would be considerably stretched as the racket is swept outwards at the end of the stroke if it is not employed.

Don't if possible grip the handle of your racket with the full strength of your little finger, or in fact of any of the fingers, unequally. This again unduly stretches those muscles on the under side of the forearm.

Don't grasp your racket as though it is a pike-staff, but rather grip it firmly yet delicately by means of the thumb and forefinger with the other fingers as controlling agencies. In this way you will always have your wrist muscles in command, and never have a wrist completely stiffened up and incapable of a delicate stroke.

Don't hold the racket with too long a grip, in this way you lose control of it, and never have the feeling that it is one with your arm that the shorter, firmer hold gives to you.

### Hints for Service

Don't forget the foot-fault rules in practice, in actual play, or at any moment. Observe them all as faithfully in practice as in actual

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matches. Bad habits in this respect are more easily picked up than in any other strokes, mainly because such a very little means so much; and a foot-fault called, spells too often a lost service game.

Don't accelerate the speed of your swing suddenly and think you will gain speed thereby. You will only mistime the ball and probably strain your arm and shoulder.

Don't waste effort in jerks, or uneven hitting at the ball, but increase the speed of your racket all through the forward swing until the ball is struck.

Don't lift the back foot from the ground until you have hit the ball. Care over this point will prevent your body from swaying, and so give your arm a truer centre from which to work, besides saving you from many foot-faults later on when you follow in your service to the net.

Always take the ball in service as high as possible without straightening completely the elbow joint before the stroke is made, since greater freedom and power are obtained by observing this point than by making the stroke with a fully extended arm. Moreover, the value of the throwing action and the power obtained

by straightening the joints of the arm in making it gives a lot of speed to the service in addition.

And always remember that ninety-nine services out of one hundred are spoiled because beginners cannot throw the ball up correctly, and never in the same manner and to the same height twice running.

The beginner should practise throwing up the ball in all his spare moments until he can do so without variation or failure ; then he will have overcome the most important obstacle towards the acquisition of a good service.

Final and most important point of all : see that you know thoroughly the laws of the game and understand them perfectly in letter and spirit before you begin to play. If the knowledge of the letter of the law is important, the understanding of its spirit is vital to good sportsmanship.

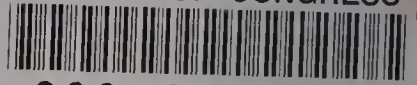








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